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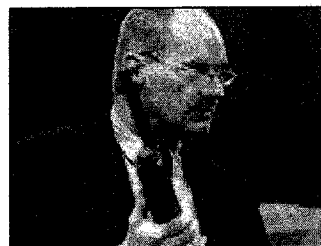
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'05 shooting at home seen as justifiable  
 Jury takes little time to decide in favor of ex-Billings  
 resident

By **BECKY SHAY**  
 Of The Gazette Staff



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A coroner's jury decided Wednesday that Leonard "Lenny" Larson was justified in the May 5, 2005, shooting death of 20-year-old Jordan Ortivez in the Heights.

The jury deliberated about an hour before announcing that Larson committed justified homicide when he shot Ortivez in Larson's home in a Heights trailer court.

The jury of four women and three men heard about five hours of testimony from 12 witnesses, including Larson.

Chief Deputy Coroner Bill Jones, a lieutenant in the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office who conducted the inquiry, told the jury members they were not to determine guilt, but whether there was "good cause" to bring charges.

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Yellowstone County Chief Deputy Attorney Mark Murphy told The Gazette the conflicting testimony was one of the reasons prosecutors decided to hold the inquest.

Ortvez's father, Julian, witnessed the shooting and has maintained from that night -- as he testified on Wednesday -- that the men's words were "conversational" in tone and that Larson had no reason to shoot his son.

"I don't understand how an individual could try to justify his actions when there was no violence or physical aggression of any kind," Julian Ortvez testified.

Larson and two friends testified on Wednesday that Jordan Ortvez was angry and agitated from the time he entered the trailer and that he paced and threatened them. Larson testified that Ortvez said he would "snap your neck like a twig."

"He was serious about what he was saying and he was going to do it no matter what," Larson said.

All agreed that the incident unfolded in less than five minutes.

Larson admitted at the hearing that he shot Ortvez but said he had no choice except to defend himself from Ortvez, who continued to advance on him even after Larson pointed the shotgun at his midsection.

"He had a look of intent on his face I've never seen before and I never want to see again," Larson said and, after questioning, added, "I had no choice" but to shoot.

Within a few minutes, Larson testified, he walked outside, unloaded the shotgun, laid it down and returned

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to the house.

Larson was held a few hours and questioned after the evening shooting. Larson has moved out of the Billings area since the incident.

Shelly Ferris, Larson's roommate at the time of the homicide, testified she knew Ortivez through a friend who was teaching him martial arts.

Ferris said that, about five days before the shooting, she saw Ortivez take her purse from her van. Apparently while Ortivez was rifling through her purse, he put down a set of keys, which she later found. Ferris testified that, in a phone call with Ortivez, she told him that he could have the keys back when she got her purse back. That was the last time they spoke, Ferris said.

Those keys were at the heart of testimony on Wednesday. Julian Ortivez testified that he came from his home in Ennis to help Jordan move away from Billings. The men took a break from packing and went for ice cream at the Dairy Queen, which is close to Larson's trailer. They walked over to the trailer to get the keys, which Jordan had to return to his landlord, Julian Ortivez said.

Julian Ortivez testified that Larson's teenaged son, who was outside painting, told the men to go inside.

Larson and the two acquaintances testified that the men walked into the trailer unannounced and that Jordan Ortivez insisted on retrieving keys from Ferris, who was not there. The situation escalated for several minutes until Larson grabbed a loaded 12-gauge shotgun that he kept in the living room and leveled it at the younger Ortivez.

Police and experts testified that the muzzle of the shotgun was less than three feet from Ortivez when Larson fired. Dr. Thomas Bennett, who performed an autopsy on Ortivez, said he died quickly of his wounds, which left a nearly 2-inch hole below his breastbone and severely damaged several organs.

Richard Voorhis, a friend of Larson's, said he stopped by Larson's house that evening to talk. Voorhis is a Billings businessman and was a college roommate of Larson's.

"The whole thing turned surreal in like 10 seconds," Voorhis said.

Within minutes of his arrival, he said, Jordan Ortivez was

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making threats of harming them.

Voorhis and Larson testified that Larson asked and told the Ortivezes to leave. While the elder Ortivez stood near the door and said nothing, Jordan Ortivez continued to get more agitated and paced, they said.

Voorhis testified that Jordan Ortivez said that if he didn't get the keys, he would "kill everybody in the room." Suddenly Larson got the gun and shot Ortivez, Voorhis said.

Ortivez took about half a step and "just collapsed on the couch," Voorhis said.

He testified that Ortivez had reached for the shotgun just before Larson fired. Voorhis said he believed Ortivez could have taken the Remington and killed Larson, himself and a woman who was also there.

"I think that if Jordan got that gun away, I think that there would have been three dead people and you'd wonder who shot us," Voorhis said.

Police testified they knew Jordan Ortivez from earlier investigations. When he died, there were felony burglary and witnesses-tampering charges pending against him. The witness tampering stemmed from Ortivez being accused of calling a burglary victim and telling her to "watch her back."

Detectives said at one point they had warned Ortivez to stay away from his house because they were going to execute a search warrant there in connection with the burglaries. As officers entered, detective Ken Paharik said, they found Ortivez had broken in through a back window and was destroying evidence.

Detectives also testified that two acquaintances of Ortivez told them that on the evening of May 4, Ortivez said he was going to "take his sticks" -- martial-arts weapons that are long bamboo wands called escrima sticks -- and confront Larson before moving out of Billings.

Sticks like those, with blood on them, were found on Larson's couch. Detectives testified that smears in the blood indicated the sticks were probably pulled from the back of Ortivez after he was shot and moved under the couch.

Larson said the men had met "a handful of times." On the

first visit, Larson said, Ortivez stole a camcorder from Larson's house but returned it -- only to steal something else; however Larson did not remember what that was. In their other encounters, Larson said, Ortivez threatened to shoot or hurt him but he "blew it off" until the night of May 5 when he was confronted and concerned for his life, his friends' lives and his son outside.

As the scene intensified, Larson said, he got the shotgun he kept nearby, pumped it to load a shell and took a couple of big steps toward Ortivez.

"In just a matter of seconds, he lunged at me," Larson said and testified that he pulled the gun up, flipped the safety off and pulled the trigger.

"To my astonishment, he didn't go flying back. He was still coming at me," Larson said.

Larson said he reloaded without realizing what he was doing. In the second he realized that he had shot Ortivez, Larson said, he started to go into shock and was saying, "Oh my God. Oh my God."

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Published on Thursday, March 16, 2006.  
Last modified on 3/16/2006 at 12:04 am

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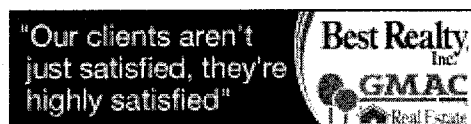
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